

A New Perspective on Life

Alex V. Bountharath's OPTIFAST Journey

Alex V. Bountharath, known to staff as "AV", is CBHA Optometry Business Manager. He has worked at CBHA for several years. "My pant size then was 38 by 30. Today, after completing the first phase (19 weeks) of CBHA's long-term weight management program, Bountharath wears size 32 by 30 pants and has lost 55 pounds with a decrease of six percent of his BMI (body mass index). "Before I began the OPTIFAST program, when I ate out and even at home, I was very uncaring about what I was doing to my body with the types of foods I was eating. This led to a lot of negative consequences which affected my sleeping habits, my appearance, and my confidence," he said. "I was also self-conscious and nervous about situations that put me in the public eye."

"I am much more energetic now. I work out without such heavy breathing, my clothes fit and shopping for clothes isn't an ordeal," he said. "However, the big life changing factor for me is the improvement in my sleeping. I rarely had a good night's rest and tested positive for sleep apnea. Since losing 55 pounds, all aspects of my life have improved; I'm sleeping better; my blood pressure has improved to the point where my medication has been cut in half." Lab tests are done at the beginning of the class in order for the OPTIFAST Team to monitor a participant's health and progress.

Bountharath credits his weight loss success to the CBHA OPTIFAST team comprised of Dr. Bashar Elali, Maria Mendoza, RN and

Vanessa Morelos, RN, Behavioral Health Specialist Elsie Garza, MSW, Karlee Kerr, Licensed, Registered Dietitian/Nutritionist, and Nathan Spinelli, Pharm D. "My interaction with this team has been amazing. Without their individual help I would never have made it this far. Dr. Elali and nurses Mendoza and Morelos tended to my medical concerns and weekly weigh – in sessions. Karlee made sure my nutritional needs were being met; Elsie helped me deal with the emotional issues involved in undertaking a long term weight loss management program. Rounding out the team is Dr. Nathan Spinelli, a pharmacist with additional training in nutrition as it integrates with medication.

During the first 13 weeks of the program, participants don't eat what we normally consider "real food". "It's not that hard really," Bountharath, said. "The bars, shakes and soup actually taste very good. The weekends are the hardest part when there are functions to attend – birthdays, graduations, etc." He encourages others to not let that stop them. "Have a bar with you and enjoy eating along with everyone else. Tell them what you are doing so they understand why you aren't eating. It will pay off – my energy levels are still there."

"We have sessions every Monday where we review health education," Bountharath said. "These sessions also give us a platform where we can talk about how we are feeling and the individual struggles of the week as well as the positives of what we had over-

come that week. Karlee and Elsie really encouraged us to open up and discuss these issues. In addition, I met with Dr. Elali and the nurses every week for a number of weeks and, then, every two weeks as the program progressed. They always made time to listen and answer any question I might have. The constant monitoring by this team has kept me compliant." The professional team is also available between sessions – particularly for participants who have suffered setbacks.

"This has been a journey for me and I really encourage others to do the same." he said. "I highly recommend the OPTIFAST program to anyone interested in improving their health and changing their lifestyle. I didn't think I would make it this far. We are encouraged throughout the program to surround ourselves with a support system that can encourage and help. I would recommend to future participants that you tell your friends, family and co-workers what you are doing so they won't question you when you aren't eating. The important thing is to set goals about the life you want to lead."

The Monday sessions aren't like normal classes. "You get to come together and learn what habits you might want to correct. We talk about why we eat, our emotions, our stress and how we can change that. I'm not much of a cook and I appreciated learning, via the nutritionist, how to blend our foods. Learning how to eat and count calories has been good."

Life after the first phase is good...he is transitioning to eating regular food. Dr. Elali recently asked him what his goals are now. "I was to keep on building lean muscle and to continue losing weight." He wants to lose 20 more pounds which will bring him to his ideal weight. He is actively working out an hour and a half every day. "I want to continue my active and healthy life style within the confines of my full-time job. I am the happiest I have been in a long time.

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